R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 018 409 TE 000 328

THE RELATIONSHIP OF TEACHER STANDARDS TO THE WRITTEN EXPRESSION OF FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADE CHILDREN.

BY- NIKOLOFF, SAYRA B.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENG.,CHAMPAIGN,ILL

PUB DATE NOV 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.28 5P.

DESCRIPTORS- *COMPOSITION (LITERARY), *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, *STANDARDS, *STUDENT REACTION, *TEACHING METHODS, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS, GRADE 5, GRADE 6, LANGUAGE ARTS, STUDENT ATTITUDES, TEACHER ATTITUDES, TEACHER EVALUATION, TEACHER INFLUENCE, TEACHER WRITING STANDARDS INVENTORY,

ONE THOUSAND STUDENT ESSAYS WERE ANALYZED TO DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT STUDENTS WHOSE TEACHERS POSSESS "MORE STRICT" STANDARDS IN COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION PERFORM DIFFERENTLY ON A STANDARDIZED ESSAY TEST THAN DO THOSE WHOSE TEACHERS HAVE "LESS STRICT" STANDARDS. FIFTH- AND SIXTH-GRADE CHILDREN FROM ALL OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND FROM DEPRIVED, AVERAGE, AND MIDDLE CLASS AREAS OF NIAGRA FALLS, NEW YORK, AND THEIR 100 TEACHERS PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY. THE "TEACHER WRITING STANDARDS INVENTORY," ESPECIALLY DEVELOPED FOR THE STUDY, WAS USED BY THE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN RATING THE TEACHERS' WRITING STANDARDS. ESSAYS PRODUCED BY THE CHILDREN--USING THE "SEQUENTIAL TESTS OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (STEP) ESSAY TEST," LEVEL 4, FORM D--WERE RANDOMLY SELECTED FOR ANALYSIS FROM FIVE GIRLS AND FIVE BOYS IN EACH CLASSROOM. THOSE COMPOSITIONS WRITTEN BY STUDENTS OF TEACHERS RATED "MORE STRICT" WERE KEPT SEPARATE FROM THOSE WRITTEN BY STUDENTS OF TEACHERS RATED "LESS STRICT," AND, SUBSEQUENTLY, THE PAPERS WERE DIVIDED INTO NORM AND VALIDATION GROUPS. SCORED FOR OVER-ALL QUALITY BY EXPERIENCED JUDGES USING THE STEP MANUAL, THE COMPOSITIONS WERE ALSO ANALYZED FOR (1) TOTAL WORDS, (2) NUMBER OF IDEAS, (3) NUMBER OF IDEAS NOT MENTIONED BY OTHERS, (4) NUMBER OF SPELLING ERRORS, AND (5) NUMBERS OF CAPITALIZATION AND END-PUNCTUATION ERRORS. NO STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN WRITING PERFORMANCE WERE REVEALED BETWEEN THE "MORE STRICT" AND "LESS STRICT" GROUPS, ALTHOUGH THE SMALL DIFFERENCES WHICH DID OCCUR FAVORED THE "LESS STRICT" STANDARDS. (THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE 1967 NCTE ANNUAL CONVENTION.) (RD)

ED018409

THE RELATIONSHIP OF TEACHER STANDARDS TO THE WRITTEN EXPRESSION OF FIFTH AND SIXTH GRADE CHILDREN

Sayra B. Nikoloff

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

This study reports an effort to determine whether fifth and sixth grade children in the classes rated as "more strict" on an inventory of teacher writing standards perform differently on a standardized essay test than do children whose teachers are rated as "less strict".

Advocates of the classroom procedures judged "less strict" represent the majority of well-known experts in the elementary language arts field. Writers such as Ruth Strickland, Alvina Burrows, Mauree Applegate and Paul Witty maintain that children in the classrooms of teachers who follow these procedures will write more freely, will produce a greater flow of ideas and of original or creative ideas, and will master mechanics better. The procedures recommended by these and other language arts experts and used as the basis of the Teacher Writing Standards Inventory include the following: acceptance of every child's written expression for recognition rather than just "the best", 2) separation of the creative and editing function in written expression, 3) emphasis on expression of ideas rather than on spelling and mechanics, 4) frequent opportunity for writing of an imaginative and personal nature while in school, and 5) diagnosis and use of children's errors for future teaching rather than for immediate fault-finding on the child's paper.

TE 000 328

PROCEDURE

In an effort to determine the degree to which a group of teachers do or do not follow these recommendations from the literature, a twenty item Teacher Writing Standards Inventory was tested, revised

and finally administered to 100 fifth and sixth grade teachers in Niagara Falls, New York. At the time of administration, there were a total of 104 fifth and sixth grades in Niagara Falls. The classes used in the study represented every elementary school in the city, and included old-city deprived areas as well as average and middle-class suburban neighborhoods. A children's form of the Inventory was responded to by all children in the study, in order to ascertain children's perceptions of teacher behavior relevant to instruction in written expression.

All children in the study were administered the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress Essay Test, Level 4, Form D. One thousand children's essays were chosen from the total of approximately 2,800 children taking the STEP test. Five boys' essays and five girls' essays were randomly selected from each of the 100 classrooms. These 1000 essays were divided into upper ("more strict teacher standards") and lower ("less strict teacher standards") groups on the basis of 1) teacher scores for the Teacher Writing Standards Inventory, and 2) mean children's scores for each teacher on the Children's Form of the TWSI. These upper and lower groups were divided into norm and validation groups for both teachers' self-scores and children's scores for their teachers.

The STEP essays, written on an assigned topic dealing with an imaginary trip to the moon, were scored for over-all quality of writing by a panel of five experienced judges who used the standards and procedures of the STEP Manual. The essays were also analyzed for the following additional criteria: 1) total number of words, 2) number of ideas, 3) number of rare ideas (a "rare" idea was defined as

an idea mentioned by no other child in the study), 4) numbers of spelling errors, and 5) numbers of capitalization and final punctuation errors. Background information on each child engaged in the study was gathered including age, sex, I.Q., previous reading and language achievement scores, and parent occupation.

PROCESSING OF THE DATA

Preliminary correlation analyses of the various criteria of the study which generated means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients for the upper ("more strict") and lower ("less strict") halves of each norm and validation group indicated that the groups were equivalent. A multivariate analysis of variance was computed for all criterion variables. The data of the study were subjected to *t* tests for differences between means and correlations, the *F* ratio for differences in variances and for testing significance of Wilks' lambda.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based upon teachers' and children's expressed perceptions of classroom emphases in the teaching of written expression, the groups representing lower scores ("less strict teacher standards") did not show statistically significant differences of performance on a writing task from the upper scoring group ("more strict teacher standards").

The differences which did appear, though small and not significant statistically, were in 23 out of 24 analyses in the direction favoring the "less strict" procedures recommended in the literature. While these findings do not provide support of a statistically significant sort for the alleged superiority of the less strict standards for children's written expression, the converse is also true; neither

do the findings provide support for those who maintain that strict teacher standards will result in fewer errors or better over-all quality of children's writing.

Another finding of the study which is worthy of note was the degree to which children's perceptions of teacher behavior related to instruction in written expression differed from teacher perceptions of their own behaviors. Differences in the teacher and pupil mean scores on the Teacher Writing Standards Inventory were significant beyond the .001 level. Pupils reported a much greater stress on mechanics, spelling, getting it "right" the first time, etc. than did their teachers. Teachers described themselves as placing much greater stress on ideas, imaginative and personal writing, separation of creative and editing functions, and acceptance of every child's efforts.

The division of groups into norm and validation groups had the effect of providing a simultaneous and exact replication of the study. The value of this replication can be seen in that one exception to the generally null findings, a highly significant F ratio for the punctuation-capitalization error variable, did not appear at all in the validation (replication) group. Thus replication prevented capitalization on chance in a report of the findings.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study produced the typical .40 to .50 correlations between IQ and language achievement, including the scores of the STEP essay test for overall quality of writing. The low correlation found between IQ and the number of ideas (.18) and between IQ and the number of rare ideas (.20) probably offer some

support to teachers and investigators of "creativity" who maintain that most children, irrespective of general ability, have something to express in writing. The children in this study who have not attained high achievement in the various academic areas were in many cases able to express a number of ideas and unusual ideas on the STEP essay test. Those low in IQ and/or language achievement tended not to express their ideas as well or with as much freedom from errors as did the higher achievers. Nevertheless, the production of these low-performance children supported the contentions of the language arts scholars concerning the ability of most children to express their ideas in writing. Over eighty per cent of all the children in the study produced at least one rare idea (mentioned by no other child in the study). The investigator concluded that those elementary teachers who hope to help children write material of an original or creative nature should not overlook the potential of the lower achieving child to produce original and unusual ideas.